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FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO ALL DIPLOMATIC AND CONSULAR POSTS COLLECTIVE
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

UNCLAS STATE 017754

FROM THE DIRECTOR GENERAL TO ALL DEPARTMENT PERSONNEL

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: APER, AMGT
SUBJECT: THE REVAMPED ASSIGNMENTS PROCESS:
MANY SUCCESSES AND MORE TO COME

REFS: A) STATE 07387, B) 06 STATE 203690,
C) 06 STATE 199214

1. With Regular Season assignments now underway for Summer 2007, I would like to share with Foreign Service employees some of what we have accomplished together during this busy assignments cycle. As you know, HR implemented a series of reforms to the bidding and assignments process intended to re-orient the Foreign Service to meet the challenges faced by the Department today by emphasizing overseas service, dedication to principles of Service need, and shared sacrifice. We are aware that some of the changes to this year's assignments rules have created concerns and, in some cases, hardships for bidders. We appreciate the support and patience that

so many of you have shown as we tackle multiple HR challenges this cycle.

2. I am pleased to report that we have had some major successes, particularly in filling positions at our most critical unaccompanied posts such as Iraq and Afghanistan. We could not have achieved this without your cooperation and willingness to serve. I also wish to thank you for your comments and suggestions through the Town Hall meetings I have held at posts around the world and through your electronic submissions to DGDirect. Taking into account our accomplishments so far, and looking ahead to the needs of the next assignments cycle (Summer 2008), we are already planning additional changes. Your input is always welcome.

New "Pre-Season" Staffs Unaccompanied Posts

3. Because of the increasing numbers of positions at unaccompanied and limited-accompaniment posts and their importance to meeting U.S. foreign policy goals, we created for this cycle a new assignments season exclusively dedicated to filling these positions. The "Pre-Season," which took place before our usual three assignments seasons (Early, Regular and Stretch), was markedly successful in attracting bidders to advertised jobs at these critical posts:

Unaccompanied

Post	Positions	Filled	% Filled

Kabul	78	76	97%
Afghan PRTs	23	21	91%
Total			
Afghanistan	101	97	96%
Baghdad	128	117	91%
Iraq PRTs	48	40	83%
Total Iraq	176	157	89%
Total			
Pakistan	66	62	94%
Total			
Saudi Arabia	60	56	93%

Total			
Unaccompanied	403	372	92%

Limited Accompaniment

Post	Positions	Filled	% Filled

Abidjan	11	8	73%
Algiers	15	15	100%
Bangui	1	1	100%
Beirut	19	17	89%
Brazzaville	3	2	67%
Bujumbura	3	3	100%
Khartoum	12	10	83%
Monrovia	7	7	100%
Pristina	8	8	100%
Sanaa	14	6	43%

Total Limited Accompaniment	93	77	83%

(Data from 2/2/2007)

4. Last year at this time, of 168 Summer 2006 positions in Iraq, 97 (58%) had been paneled, compared to 2007's figure of 89% to date. This demonstrates that the Pre-Season helped to attract the attention of qualified bidders and gave them and NEA ample opportunity to come to agreement on appropriate assignments early on in the cycle.

5. By this time, 16% of the entire Foreign Service is serving or has already in Iraq (11%) or Afghanistan (5%), a remarkable percentage. Many of the Department's Civil Service employees have also stepped forward to do LNA assignments or TDY service at these posts.

Iraq, Afghanistan Bidders Receiving Top Choices

6. HR has promised bidders completing tours in Iraq and Afghanistan "strongest consideration" for one of their top onward assignments. For bidders coming out of Iraq PRTs, we have promised that the employee will receive one of his/her top five choices (at personal grade, in-cone, excepting DCM/PO positions and positions requiring language waivers). Data from the current cycle show that we have been living up to these promises:

-- Among the 124 bidders coming out of Baghdad and

Afghanistan, 101 (81%) are already assigned or have handshakes, and at least 62 received one of their top-choice bids for onward assignment (not all bidders reported their top choices to HR/CDA).

-- Of the 27 bidders completing tours in Iraq PRTs, 26 are already assigned or have handshakes to top-choice positions.

"Firewall" Before Regular Season Fills Critical Jobs

7. While making reforms to the substance and timing of our assignments process, I made a commitment early in the current cycle that HR would fill all critical overseas positions with Summer 2007 job starts before we would

begin Regular Season assignments to posts with less than 15 % differential and to domestic jobs. I am pleased that, working closely with the bureaus, we have largely accomplished that goal. By mid-January, all but 40 Summer 2007 vacancies designated by HR and the bureaus as critical to fill at posts with 20%-or-greater differentials were filled or were on their way to being filled. Those 40 positions had no qualified eligible bidders. HR/CDA compiled lists of bidders who would be qualified for these jobs and could be considered for them if no bidders were to come forward. We announced these 40 positions in reftel A. Since then, 15 of these positions have been filled by Foreign Service, Civil Service or EFM personnel (another was subsequently withdrawn and will not be filled at this time).

8. We also briefly delayed the start of Regular Season for FS-02 generalists, the group subject to the largest deficit of employees to available positions in the Foreign Service, to take stock of unbid FS-02 vacancies. Working with the bureaus, we determined that there remain seven FS-02 generalist positions without qualified bidders (in addition to those included in the critical-to-fill exercise mentioned above) that also must be filled immediately. HR/CDA compiled lists of eligible bidders suitable for consideration for those positions as well. Once that task was completed, we permitted Regular Season assignments for other FS-02 generalists to go forward.

9. We have combined the remaining 31 unbid positions from these two sources and will soon send them out as an omnibus volunteer cable. We are doing this both to attract Foreign Service, Civil Service and EFM bidders to these must-fill jobs and to demonstrate that we in HR consider identification procedures to be a very last

resort to fill these vacancies. I remain hopeful that the omnibus volunteer cable will generate sufficient interest among potential bidders that identifications will not be necessary.

Civil Service and Professional Associates

10. One of my highest priorities as Director General has been to expand opportunities for overseas service among two of the Department's most important resources: Civil Service employees and Eligible Family Members (via the Professional Associates program). With the cooperation of the bureaus, AFSA, and FSI, in this cycle we were able to offer dozens of opportunities for overseas service to CS and EFM personnel during Early Season, and to authorize up to six months of language training in addition to job-related training at FSI (reftels B and C). Sixteen CS and EFMs have already received handshakes to Summer 2007 overseas generalist and specialist positions, and other handshakes are under consideration. We are hoping for more CS and EFM responses to our recent omnibus volunteer cable (reftel A), the first such cable to specifically include Professional Associates in addition to FS and CS employees.

11. According to our latest figures, we currently have 161 Civil Service and 10 Professional Associates serving in Fbreign Service positions abroad. These employees are adding diverse experience and fresh perspectives to our overseas missions. At a time when we are dealing with mid-level employee deficits in several skill odes, they are also helping us to fill many important positions we could not otherwise fill. HR is currently studying ways to increase career mobility for CS personnel and family members to help us take fuller advantage of their talents in the long run. For Civil Service employees, we are working to improve procedures for bidding on and accepting Foreign Service positions by Limited Non-career Appointments, and to facilitate conversions to the Foreign Service for interested employees with the proper experience. For EFMs, we intend to improve hiring rules and procedures in light of our acute staffing needs at many overseas posts.

Assignments Technician Shop Gets a Boost

12. HR is now taking steps to fix an area that has been a big problem and source of frustration: the travel and

personnel action services provided by the Assignments Technicians in HR/CDA/AD. A number of factors last year

contributed to a level of service that did not meet your needs. HR/CDA is now taking steps to improve that performance for the coming transfer season: five WAEs and contractors have been hired to address a short-term Tech staffing shortage, with some of these new employees coming on board this week; HR/CDA/AD is implementing an improved office structure with new supervisory arrangements and better training to improve customer service, workflow speed, and accountability; and HR/EX and HR/CDA are working together to deploy new computer software to improve tracking of travel orders.

13. We believe that employees transferring in Summer 2007 will see the benefits of these improvements, and we ask for your patience as we put them in place.

14. MINIMIZE CONSIDERED.
RICE